

Women Workers' Strategies in the Sago Product Business Sector to Improve Family Welfare in Pasar Tebat Village, North Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to comprehensively identify and analyze the strategies adopted by women workers in the sago product business sector to enhance the welfare of their families in Pasar Tebat Village, North Bengkulu, Indonesia. The research focuses on five key informants, consisting of the owner of a sago processing facility, a factory supervisor, and three female laborers directly involved in the sago production process. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation to gain a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic dynamics experienced by these women. The findings reveal that women play a critical role in the sago production chain, particularly in labor-intensive stages such as drying. Their involvement is not limited to physical labor but extends to the formulation of coping strategies to balance multiple roles as workers and caregivers. The primary strategies identified include effective time management to reconcile domestic responsibilities and factory work, adherence to work discipline to maintain productivity, and the consistent practice of saving a portion of their income for future family needs. These strategies are influenced by socio-cultural norms, economic necessity, and personal resilience.

Despite facing challenges such as unpredictable weather affecting production and the dual burden of domestic and professional roles, these women demonstrate high levels of perseverance and adaptability. Their earnings, though modest, serve as a vital supplementary income for their households and contribute meaningfully to the financial stability and overall well-being of their families. This study highlights the significance of women's economic participation in rural informal sectors and the potential of localized, small-scale enterprises in supporting family welfare and community resilience.

Keywords: Women Workers' Strategies, Sago Product Business, Family Welfare

INTRODUCTION

Family economic resilience is a dynamic condition reflecting a family's capacity to endure and adapt to internal and external threats that may endanger their economic continuity. As the smallest unit of society, families with robust economic resilience serve as the cornerstone for national economic stability (Wulandari, 2017). Family resilience encompasses physical, material, and mental toughness as well as the agility required to navigate dynamic family conditions and sustain independent living (Siregar, 2022). In the context of

Indonesia, this resilience forms a vital foundation for national development and social welfare, promoting self-sufficiency and reduced dependence on external support (Septilia et al., 2024).

In traditional Indonesian society, labor division between men and women often reflects gendered roles shaped by reproductive functions and cultural expectations. Women's roles are frequently confined to the domestic sphere or informal sectors, despite their significant contributions to productive labor (Indah Ahdiah, 2013). However, women are not mere objects within economic structures—they are active agents of change. Their empowerment has proven instrumental in enhancing household economic resilience and fostering sustainable national development (Alie & Elanda, 2020). This is particularly evident in rural, agriculture-based industries such as sago processing, where women's labor plays a pivotal role (Kusumaningrum, 2016).

Women's participation in income-generating activities is vital for family income diversification and stabilization. The ability of women to fulfill this role is highly influenced by socio-cultural support and gender-equitable policies. Access to education, healthcare, and economic resources strengthens their agency, contributing to a harmonious and resilient household (Putra Ari et al., 2024). Nevertheless, women working in sago processing face numerous structural barriers, such as limited access to capital, inadequate vocational training, and the dual burden of domestic and industrial labor (Ayu et al., 2024). These challenges are further exacerbated by entrenched social norms that restrict women to marginal economic roles (Alie & Elanda, 2020).

Patriarchal values and gender-biased perceptions continue to limit women's roles in economic and leadership domains, often branding them as less competent. Such stereotypes, deeply embedded in cultural norms, hinder women's full participation in the labor force (Apriliandra & Krisnani,

2021). This has prompted calls for a holistic response encompassing skill development, access to financial services, institutional support, and transformation of cultural attitudes toward gender (Matter, 2021).

The Rembio Sago Product Business in Lubuk Tanjung Village, established in 2014, offers a case study on the participation of women in the sago processing sector and its impact on family economic resilience. Based on field observations and interviews conducted with the business owner (R1) on December 15, 2024, it was found that most women workers have been employed for over four years and reside near the factory. The enterprise is independently run, producing up to seven tons of sago per day, with distribution networks reaching as far as Sukabumi (20-ton shipments).

The factory employs 23 permanent workers, including 8 women—primarily housewives—earning a fixed monthly salary of IDR 2 million. These women are engaged in crucial production stages such as drying and lifting processed sago, which are essential for maintaining product quality. Meanwhile, 15 male workers, earning between IDR 2–2.5 million, handle tasks including grating, washing, and bagging the sago. Distribution is managed by male workers, while marketing is overseen directly by the business owner.

Most women workers regard their employment as supplementary income, essential for meeting daily needs despite not fully covering household expenses. The primary challenges faced include weather disruptions (e.g., rainfall halts production and thus income), dual work burdens at the factory and home, and persistent social stigma that relegates women to domestic roles. These factors often lead to fatigue and diminished productivity among women workers.

Women adopt several resilience strategies, including punctual attendance, effective time management between work and family, and disciplined savings behavior. However, occupational safety remains a concern as protective equipment such as gloves and

safety footwear is not provided, increasing workplace injury risks.

The study also highlights the critical need for multi-tiered support:

1. Family support, shared responsibilities in domestic tasks and emotional encouragement to enable women's economic participation.
2. Community support, reinforcing the value of women's contributions through social recognition and encouragement.
3. Implementation of sustainable training programs on product processing, business management, and marketing, beyond one-off workshops.

In conclusion, the Rembio sago factory demonstrates that women's participation in rural agro-industries significantly contributes to family economic resilience. However, achieving greater empowerment and equity requires concerted efforts to dismantle socio-cultural barriers and provide institutional support systems that promote inclusive and sustainable development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Understanding Family Economic Resilience

Family economic resilience can be broadly defined as a family's ability to sustain its well-being amid economic pressures. This concept incorporates the capacity to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to financial shocks while maintaining core functions such as health, education, and adequate living standards. It is not only about recovering from economic hardship but also about transforming vulnerability into strength. Families that are economically resilient are typically proactive in managing their resources and making informed decisions to secure their future.

Wulandari (2017) argues that a resilient family contributes to societal stability and national economic growth by reducing dependency on government assistance. Economic resilience, in this sense, is a

micro-foundation of macroeconomic stability. When families are able to meet their own needs, they help reduce the burden on social safety nets and public welfare systems. The ripple effect extends to the community level, where clusters of resilient families can foster communal resilience and mutual support systems.

Siregar (2022) adds a psychosocial dimension to this concept, emphasizing that resilience is also determined by mental and emotional readiness. Economic pressures often cause stress, and families with poor mental coping mechanisms may be more susceptible to breakdowns, including domestic violence or child neglect. Therefore, resilience is deeply intertwined with emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, and a collective sense of responsibility among family members.

The strategies families employ to build resilience vary depending on their context. These may include diversification of income sources, savings and credit practices, shared domestic roles, and leveraging local resources. In rural areas, informal economies—such as subsistence agriculture or microenterprises—often play a key role in sustaining household resilience. These strategies must be adaptive and flexible, especially in the face of global uncertainties such as climate change or pandemics. In short, family economic resilience is both a strategy and an outcome. It requires supportive policies, inclusive access to resources, and an enabling environment. For researchers and practitioners, understanding the dimensions of economic resilience helps identify leverage points for interventions that support sustainable livelihoods and gender equity.

2. Women's Contribution to Economic Resilience

The economic contribution of women, especially in rural and traditional societies, has often been overlooked or undervalued. Historically, women's roles were defined through domestic responsibilities, child-rearing, and caregiving. However, economic necessity and social transformation have

pushed women into more active roles in the labor force, particularly in informal sectors and microenterprises. In doing so, women not only supplement household income but also contribute to community-level economic vitality. Ahdiah (2013) contends that women are pivotal in economic resilience because of their dual role in reproduction and production. They manage household resources while also engaging in income-generating activities. This "double burden" is both a strength and a challenge. On one hand, it positions women as vital economic agents; on the other hand, it exposes them to time poverty and increased stress. Nevertheless, many women have successfully navigated these dual roles by integrating productive work within domestic routines.

Women's involvement in economic activities is not limited to entrepreneurship. They also serve as laborers, service providers, producers, and innovators within their communities. Their contribution is especially significant in rural settings, where formal job opportunities are limited and social networks become critical for survival. According to Putra Ari et al. (2024), when women are empowered economically, the benefits extend beyond income—they lead to improved nutrition, better education for children, and more equitable gender dynamics within families.

Furthermore, empowering women in the economy has a multiplier effect. Women tend to reinvest a higher percentage of their earnings into their families and communities compared to men. This makes their economic participation not only a matter of individual empowerment but also a strategy for collective development. Interventions that support women—such as access to microcredit, skill training, and market linkages—have proven to uplift entire households. Yet, for their contributions to be sustained, women need enabling environments. This includes legal recognition of their work, supportive social norms, and institutional frameworks that ensure fair access to resources and

protection from exploitation. Women are not simply “beneficiaries” of development programs—they are co-creators of resilience and drivers of local innovation.

3. Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Economic Participation

Despite their growing roles in economic life, women continue to face systemic obstacles rooted in socio-cultural norms and institutional biases. Patriarchal traditions often restrict women's autonomy by assigning them roles deemed appropriate for their gender. In many rural areas, women's mobility is limited, and their decision-making power is constrained by male-dominated family structures. These norms create an invisible ceiling that limits women's access to education, finance, and public participation. Alie and Elanda (2020) highlight that social perceptions about gender roles shape not only how women are treated but also how they view themselves. When internalized, these beliefs may lead women to undervalue their own contributions or refrain from pursuing leadership roles. In such contexts, women's potential remains untapped—not because of lack of ability but due to constrained opportunities and low self-efficacy.

Economic barriers also intersect with educational and legal obstacles. Many women in microenterprises lack formal education, business training, or legal literacy. This undermines their ability to engage in more profitable or scalable business activities. Ayu et al. (2024) argue that without interventions that address both the structural and cultural barriers, efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship will have limited impact. Subagja (2022) emphasizes the importance of addressing these barriers through a cultural lens. Change must come not only through policy but also through community dialogue and education that challenge discriminatory norms. Involving men and traditional leaders in these efforts is essential to ensure that change is embraced rather than resisted.

Ultimately, if women are to thrive as economic actors, they must be supported by a system that respects their dignity and nurtures their capacities. Addressing socio-cultural barriers requires a long-term, intersectional approach that integrates gender justice into every level of policy and practice.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with a case study approach. According to Sugiyono (2022), qualitative research serves as an umbrella for various research methods aimed at investigating social phenomena in their natural settings. In this research, the data obtained are analyzed qualitatively, focusing on the meaning and depth of understanding rather than quantitative measurement. This approach allows for a rich exploration of the strategies employed by female workers in the sago product sector to enhance family welfare in Pasar Tebat Village, Bengkulu Utara. The research was conducted in Pasar Tebat Village, located in Air Napal Subdistrict, Bengkulu Utara Regency. The subjects of the study include the factory owner, the factory supervisor (mandor), and female workers employed at the sago factory in the village. This selection provides a comprehensive perspective on the internal dynamics of the microenterprise and the role of women within it.

Data collection was carried out through a combination of interviews, observations, and documentation, ensuring triangulation to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Interviews, as described by Sugiyono (2022), involve direct interaction between the researcher and participants to uncover their views, experiences, and perceptions. Both structured and unstructured interview formats were utilized to elicit in-depth information. Observations served as a fundamental method to gather factual data from the natural environment of the factory and its operations, aligning with Sugiyono's view that observation is the foundation of all scientific knowledge.

Documentation complemented these methods by providing additional evidence from existing records, reports, and relevant artifacts, which strengthened and validated the collected data.

To ensure data validity, the study applied triangulation techniques, which included source triangulation (cross-verifying information from different participants), time triangulation (collecting data at different times to observe consistency), and technique triangulation (using multiple data collection methods). This comprehensive triangulation strategy enhances the credibility of the research by minimizing bias and allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena.

Data analysis followed an inductive process involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction entailed selecting, focusing, and simplifying the large volume of raw data from interviews, observations, and documents to highlight relevant information. The data were then organized into descriptive narratives to identify emerging patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified to ensure the findings were trustworthy and could be responsibly reported. This analytical process underscores the study's commitment to depth, rigor, and accountability in exploring how female workers' strategies contribute to family economic resilience in the sago microenterprise context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Field research reveals that female workers in the sago factory in Pasar Tebat Village, North Bengkulu, implement various strategies to balance their dual roles as homemakers and breadwinners, which directly contribute to family economic resilience. The primary strategy employed is efficient time management, utilizing a two-shift working system: morning shift from 07:00 to 10:00 and afternoon shift from 14:00 to 16:00. This system enables women to fulfill both domestic duties and work

obligations simultaneously. Choosing to work in the sago factory is a conscious strategy driven by the job's flexible schedule, proximity to their homes, low educational requirements, and opportunity to remain close to family. Although the income is modest, the job provides tangible economic benefits. Many female workers reported using their earnings to meet daily household needs, support their children's education, and some even indicated that through their factory work, they were able to fund their children's undergraduate degrees. This finding suggests that employment in the sago factory functions not only as supplementary income but also as a primary pillar in advancing the family's economic well-being.

Moreover, the success of these strategies is reinforced by a supportive social environment, including husbands, extended family, coworkers, supervisors, and factory owners, who offer both emotional and practical assistance. With their own income, female workers gain greater economic independence, demonstrating that informal sector employment, when managed effectively, can serve as a vital instrument in enhancing family economic stability and welfare.

The strategies employed by female workers are crucial in enhancing women's roles by enabling them to develop their potential for greater independence and productivity. This is grounded in the premise that women's empowerment and independence must be recognized and valued by society at large, as women constitute a valuable human resource (Siregar et al., 2022). According to Rimawati and Ervanto (2015), women have the potential to contribute significantly to household income, particularly to assist husbands amid economic limitations. Female participation in economic welfare is further driven by evolving societal views on gender equality in education and an

increased awareness of the necessity for women's involvement in development. Additionally, the desire for financial independence motivates women to meet living expenses through their own earnings.

Strategies of Female Workers

A key strategy emphasized is the pursuit of equality in decision-making, which is essential for empowering women. Women workers must engage in shifts of power, meaning their involvement in decision-making processes both within the family and the wider community is necessary (Mulyana & Asiah, 2017). Research findings reveal that female workers in the Pasar Tebat sago factory skillfully manage their working hours to balance family care. Flexible working hours, the factory's proximity, and supportive social environments make this employment an attractive option. Although earnings are not substantial, they provide significant support to the household economy.

Interviews with female workers further illustrate this point:

Respondent R3 shared:

"My strategy is to manage time well between work and family, as well as improve my skills to enhance work results and increase income."

Respondent R4 stated:

"I carry out my job responsibly and divide my time properly between work and family so that both run smoothly."

Respondent R5 explained:

"I work with discipline, always arriving on time, and strive to increase production output. I also manage my income wisely, setting aside funds for family needs such as children's school expenses and savings. This way, I can contribute more effectively at work and help improve family welfare."



Figure 1. Activities of female workers at the Rembio sago factory in Pasar Tebat Village, North Bengkulu, during the sago drying process.

These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Siregar et al. (2022), who argue that women's strategies are vital to enhancing their role in realizing independence and creativity. Women's contributions as valuable human resources must be acknowledged broadly. Astuti (2012) also supports the view that women contribute to household income, particularly to assist their husbands amid economic constraints. The shift in societal perceptions towards equal education and the recognition of women's role in development are key drivers for their economic participation. Moreover, the aspiration for financial independence encourages women to rely on their own earnings to meet living costs.

Supporting these perspectives, Zaeun (2022) highlights that women's strategies not only provide access to economic resources but also address social structural inequalities that restrict women's full participation in development. Kerja et al. (2020) add that female workers perform dual roles inside and outside the workplace to produce goods and services fulfilling family needs. Diverse perceptions on women managing dual roles as homemakers and workers influence these strategies.

These strategies are operationalized as a series of actions balancing productive and reproductive roles in daily life, particularly in work and family contexts. They involve time management, sharing domestic responsibilities, and seeking social support. Women juggling dual roles rely on effective

time management, personal time ("me time"), and quality family interactions to maintain mental and physical well-being (Dharmayanti, 2020). Moreover, female workers develop open strategies such as collective actions and union participation, as well as closed strategies like internal discussions and advocacy to fight for normative labor rights often neglected, including fair wages, menstrual leave, and health guarantees (Ummah, 2019). In the informal sector or small industries, empowerment includes skills training, access to capital, and institution building to foster economic independence (Ma'ruf & Masmulyadi, 2013).

Further, Laelatul and Tetteng (2023) emphasize that long-term empowerment strategies encompass capacity building through education, financial literacy, and equal career opportunities. Women equipped with skills and information are more capable of overcoming structural barriers in both work and home environments. Coping strategies such as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are essential for handling pressures from dual roles. Family support and social role management also remain integral to women's efforts in harmonizing work and personal life (Aulia Mardinah, 2018). Februari (2019) supports these findings, highlighting that female workers play a crucial role in improving household economic welfare by employing strategies such as efficient time management, sound

financial planning, and active involvement in production to increase income. Hairina and Fadhila (2019) underscore the necessity of family support and equitable sharing of domestic duties, which enable women to perform both roles effectively without sacrificing either.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that female workers in the sago factory in Pasar Tebat Village, North Bengkulu, employ effective strategies to balance their dual roles as homemakers and income earners, significantly contributing to their family's economic resilience. The key strategy involves efficient time management, utilizing flexible working hours that allow them to fulfill both domestic responsibilities and work demands. The choice to work in the sago factory is a conscious decision influenced by factors such as flexible schedules, proximity to home, and the absence of formal education requirements, which together facilitate their ability to remain close to family while earning an income.

Although the income earned is modest, it provides tangible economic benefits that support daily household needs and children's education, with some workers even financing higher education for their children. This employment thus serves not only as a supplementary income source but also as a critical pillar for family economic advancement. Moreover, the presence of a supportive social environment—including family members, supervisors, and coworkers—enhances their capacity to maintain this balance.

The study highlights the importance of women's economic independence as a driver for empowerment, recognizing women as valuable human resources who actively contribute to household income and overall community development. Strategies implemented by these women extend beyond economic participation to include negotiating decision-making power within the household and advocating for gender

equality in both familial and societal contexts.

In summary, the role of female workers in the informal sago industry exemplifies how targeted strategies and social support systems enable women to overcome challenges of dual responsibilities, fostering both personal empowerment and improved family welfare. These findings underscore the critical need for policies and programs that enhance women's access to flexible employment, skills training, and social support to promote sustainable economic resilience in rural communities.

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